United Nations E/2004/NGO/10

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
27 April 2004

Original: English

Substantive session of 2004
New York, 28 June-23 July 2004
Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
Resources mobilization and enabling environment for poverty eradication in the context of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010

Statement submitted by Global Action on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* * *

* E/2004/100.

04-32622 (E) 270504

Global Action on Aging is a non-governmental organization that works on the social and economic issues facing older persons worldwide. We have taken up human claims of older persons caught in armed conflict. As you will recall, the United Nations adopted the Madrid Plan of Action Ageing in 2002 that called on governments to "protect and assist older persons caught in armed conflicts and foreign occupation." Today, more than 30.5 million older persons live in the Least Developed Countries and constitute 5% of their population. In many Least Developed Countries, elderly face extremely difficult circumstances. At least two-thirds of these elder citizens find themselves in a land where armed conflict is underway or has occurred during the past decade.

We ask this High Level Segment to advocate for special protective measures for older perso caught in armed conflict and during the instability that frequently follows. The elderly in Least Developed Countries have much to contribute, but they can be especially vulnerable in times of cris famine and war. The international community is scarcely aware of the special difficulties faced by older persons in such crises. Humanitarian and relief agencies, as well as the United Nations, have developed programs to attend to the needs of children, women, and humanitarian workers, but they have scant knowledge of older persons and virtually no programs or guidelines for their protection.

The conflicts in today's world usually take a heavy toll on civilian populations and give rise tens of millions of refugees and displaced persons. As a result, the elderly are seriously at risk. Organizations working on the rights of older persons have expressed increasing concern and called f positive measures by international organizations to protect affected older persons.

The international community recently took important steps to strengthen the protection of other vulnerable groups – children, women and humanitarian workers – caught in situations of arme conflict. Thus far, however, little has been done to protect older persons. In 1999, for example, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1261, enunciating its commitment to the protection of children. Similarly, the Council set out its commitment to the protection of women in Resolution 1325 of 2000. A number of other Council resolutions and Presidential statements refer to these issue and the UN has set up special programs to monitor them. These precedents show the way for elder advocates, but they demonstrate a large gap in the awareness and action of the international community on elder rights.

Some preliminary steps on older persons suggest the emerging concern. A 2000 Help Age International report entitled "Older People in Disasters and Humanitarian Crises" sets forth guidelin based on interviews in a number of crisis areas. In 2000, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees adopted a new "Policy on Older Refugees" that identifies the special plight of older persons displace in conflict. Then in 2002 the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing called on the international community to protect and assist older persons in situations of armed conflict and foreig occupation. Delegations from 158 nations adopted the Plan of Action that was later confirmed by th UN General Assembly. Though these developments are encouraging, much remains to be done befo protection can become a reality on the ground for vulnerable older persons.

Global Action on Aging suggests that the Economic and Social Council use the innovative structure of its Ad Hoc Advisory Groups to address the needs and skills of older persons in the

delicate period when countries move from armed conflict to post-conflict to development. The Ad Hoc Advisory Groups to Guinea-Bissau and to Burundi examined the humanitarian and economic needs of these countries. They advised the national leadership on managing the transition and attracting international funding. This 2004 High Level Segment has examined these two reports revealing substantial positive change after years of conflict. Each Ad Hoc Advisory Groups focused attention on the countries' progress and their internal and external needs, such as debt relief, market access and overcoming obstacles to economic recovery while rebuilding their devastated nations.

Global Action on Aging asks the Economic and Social Council to include the protection of older persons as an important element in future Ad Hoc Advisory Groups' plans in other post-conflict locations where they may be established. In conflict areas, older persons often do not leave their homeland due to mobility issues and other reasons. They face banditry, dispossession of homes and land, isolation and sometimes ethnic "cleansing." However, older persons often can assist in peace building and community reconciliation so needed after wars.

Specifically, we suggest that the Economic and Social Council

- Encourage UN agencies to gather concrete information and develop programs to document and address older persons' situation in armed conflict and during the post-conflict period
- Press for new mandates in UN agencies and the Security Council that include the needs of older persons
- Determine that special measures must be taken to assure that older persons receive humane treatment and opportunities to contribute to post-conflict reconciliation and development
- Emphasize the positive effect that older person can have in mediation, crisis-prevention, peace-building and community solidarity

As a Non Governmental Organization, Global Action on Aging will

- Gather and disseminate information from scholars, journalists, humanitarian workers and other sources about older persons in conflict and crisis
- Bring together experts to deepen shared understanding of the issues and problems, as well as funding support from non-governmental organizations